

**Modern Indian Writing in Translation**  
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**Stench of Kerosene Part - 3**  
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Hello, everyone. I will be discussing the story, Stench of Kerosene by Amrita Pritam. Okay, so I will start by giving a brief summary of the story, and then we will move on to look at some interesting aspects of it. So the story, Stench of Kerosene was originally written in Punjabi, and the version we are dealing with is translated by Khushwant Singh.

The story is about I would say, a family who lives in a village called Lakarmandi in Punjab. And it comprises a husband, a wife, a husband, his wife and the husband's parents, it is just the four of them. The wife is called Guleri and the story starts out with her. She is the first character we come in contact with when the story begins.

So let's look at the beginning here. It says "Outside, a mare neighed. Guleri recognized the neighing and ran out of the house. The mare was from her parents' village. She put her head against its neck as if it were the door of her father's house." So, Guleri is living at her husband's village in Lakarmandi. Her husband is called Manak and as we see later on every year during the harvest festival after the monsoons, Guleri goes home to her parents' house for a few days or a week. And then, she meets with her childhood friends. They talk, they discuss the different trajectories their lives have taken. And then, the fair happens in Chamba, which is where Guleri is. And then Manak goes to the fair, he and Guleri go around the fair. And then they come back to Lakarmandi together. And this is how it has been for about seven years because Guleri has been married for seven years in the story.

But let's go back to the opening paragraph that, that I just read out. It says "Guleri recognized the neighing and ran out of the house." That is one of the first indications we have of how attached Guleri is to her parents' house and to her village, the village she grew up in, because yes, she's been married to Manak and she's been married to him for seven years and living in Lakarmandi for seven years. And we also see that she is an extremely dutiful daughter-in-law. She cooks, she cleans, she respects her parents'-in-law, and she does everything that they say and she seems to be loved and blessed by them. And the only time she is truly excited throughout the year is when she gets to go home for the span of two weeks to meet with her family and with her friends.

Guleri knows her home village so very well that, and the animals on her father's farm, that she can recognize even the sound of the horse neighing and just the presence of, what do you say, just the presence of a living being from her own village is enough to make her feel like she's at home. Because right there at the end of the first paragraph, she leans her head against the horse's neck as if it were the door of her father's house.

So this first paragraph really does not seem to offer much when you read it for the first time. But when you've read the story once and you go back to it, it has a lot of things packed into it. Guleri, now, Guleri is also equally invested in her life as Manak's wife. She loves him, she likes to listen to him play his flute. Whenever she feels homesick and she goes to a spot where she can view her home village, she takes Manak with her. And it says here that "She would see the homes of Chamba twinkling in the sunlight and would come back with her heart glowing with pride." And then, so going home to Chamba is from this story, the only indication that Guleri ever has new things to buy or new things to do. And it's like a shopping trip for her as well as catching up with her friends. Because, here we are, "The girls look forward to this annual meeting when they spent many hours every day talking about their experiences, their joys and sorrows. They went by the streets together. Then there was the harvest festival. The girls would have new dresses made for the occasion, they would have their dupattas dyed and starched and sprinkled with mica. They would buy glass bangles and silver earrings. Guleri always counted the days to the harvest."

So it is the one event she has throughout the entire year to look forward to. And she is always excited about it. And she doesn't have to put her excitement into words. She, she's very transparent. Her face reveals everything. And okay, let's move on.

So this is the first introduction we have to Guleri and to her life as Manak's wife. And the first introduction we have to Manak is we see him as a very taciturn man, who perhaps does not express much emotion. Because while Guleri is extremely excited at the prospect of going back and it is very obviously written all over her face and in her actions, it says "Her husband Manak pulled at his chillum and closed his eyes. It seemed either as if he did not like the tobacco or that he could not bear to face his wife." So, you get the image of a man who sits there smoking his chillum, just watching while his wife is doing all her daily duties in a very excited manner. And he seems, the first sense you get that is, he's annoyed and slightly upset that she's going away. And Guleri, and the author lets us continue with this feeling that we get that he is annoyed and upset because you see Guleri telling him that she only goes home once a year, and it is

only for a few weeks, and she's always back and no one has ever stopped her. And that, you know, he shouldn't be unhappy because she is there all year for him and she only goes home to her parents and to her friends for a very short time.

So I will move on with the story and finish giving a summary and then we will move on to some interesting aspects. So Guleri goes home, Manak drops her off halfway through, drops her halfway home. He walks with her and her father's manservant, and the horse he has brought for Guleri. Guleri pleads with him to come to the fair, so that he can play his flute and they can go home together as usual. And Manak simply looks at her sadly and Guleri thinks that he is upset that she is leaving for a few days and she lets him go back and she goes on to her parents' house.

But later on, we come to know that Manak has other reasons for not wanting Guleri to leave. He doesn't want her to go because he knows that his mother is not very happy that he and Guleri have not been able to have any children and she wants grandchildren and she wants her son to have children. And she believes Guleri is infertile and she is unable to give them children. And Manak's mother has decided to procure a second wife for Manak for the price of 500 rupees, once Guleri is out of the way for a few days during the harvest festival.

Now Manak knows all this but he is unable to say anything to Guleri because in the course of the story we see that his mother is the one who runs the household and runs the lives of the people in it, at least in serious decisions such as these. But it is done. Once Guleri is out of the way at her parents' house, Manak is married off to another wife. And we assume, but because we are given no indication of this, we assume that Guleri is, hears about this or someone conveys the news to her.

When it's time for the harvest festival to happen, and usually, Manak and all his friends would go, but this time around Manak refuses to go. He sees one of his friends setting out for the harvest festival as usual. And he also sees him come back. And the friend tells him that Guleri is dead and Manak stops what he is doing and he is extremely shocked and he asks how? And the friend continues in a very flat tone of voice that Guleri heard about Manak's second marriage and she set herself on fire. She soaked herself in kerosene and she set herself alight. And that is how she died, she committed suicide.

Again, we are given no indication as to what Guleri's thoughts were. It is just the blunt facts that are stated. Here we are, talking about Guleri. "When she heard of her second marriage, she

soaked her clothes in kerosene and set fire to them.” That is all we got to hear about Guleri’s death. Not about how she heard the news, not about what she felt when she heard the news, did she faint, did she cry, did she scream, laugh, was she shocked into silence? There’s accounting for the hiatus between her hearing of the news and her action. Because the way this is written presents both as a continuous event. She heard of your marriage, she soaked her clothes in kerosene and she set them to fire. It’s a very continuous event.

Once this happens Manak is mute with pain and he can feel his own life burning out. And as things do, things seem to go back to normal in Manak’s life. He goes to work in the fields every day, he has a second wife to replace Guleri. His second wife is pregnant with a child but she complains that Manak does not talk to her, does not interact with her as a husband should with a wife. Instead, she complains to her mother-in-law that Manak is simply someone she happened to marry. Manak’s mother encourages the new wife to be patient, and she says it will be very, very different when the son is born and Manak will come around then and you must have patience.

And eventually a son is born, and when the baby is born, the child is placed in Manak’s lap by his mother and Manak’s mother hopes to be able to gain some reaction out of this. And she does, except it’s not the one she was hoping for. Because here we see that “Manak stared at the newborn baby in his lap. He stared a long time, uncomprehending, his face, as usual expressionless. Then suddenly the blank eyes filled with horror, and Manak began to scream. ‘Take him away,’ he shrieked hysterically. ‘Take him away, he stinks of kerosene!’ “ And that is where the story ends, that is how the story ends.

It’s a very powerful ending. And you see that the news of Guleri’s death or the manner in which he heard of it because if that’s how we hear of Guleri’s death that is exactly how Manak hears of Guleri’s death. And there is no reference made to any conversation he might have had with his parents about this or there is no mention of any talk that might be going around the village about how Guleri killed herself while she was at her parent’s house because Manak married another woman. There is none of that. So you’re forced to believe that all the information that we as readers are given about Guleri’s death is also the same information that goes to Manak. And on the strength of that, the ending is much, much stronger. Because the smell of kerosene haunts Manak for a very long time.

This is a brief summary of the story. Now, let us move on to look at some interesting features of the story. One feature is how Amrita Pritam writes about rural village life, and it is shown

as very pretty. I wouldn't say it's idyllic because of how the story progresses, but it is shown as very pretty and very content is what I would say because there is, and I'll substantiate with examples from the text. Here we are. "Once every year after the harvest had been gathered in." Harvest had been gathered in it, it gives you the image of plenty in your mind, although that is not usually the case. But it does give you an image of people working together, working hard putting the harvest in.

"Guleri was allowed to spend a few days with her parents. They sent a man to Lakarmandi to bring her back to Chamba." That also speaks of a slower pace of life because this is the one main event in the year, which is also extremely crucial for agrarian economies. So the harvest is gathered in and that's when Guleri gets to go home. This is the only travel, the only journey she makes once a year, which is to go back to her parents' house. So it is a huge event.

"Guleri always counted the days to the harvest. When autumn breezes cleared the skies of monsoon clouds, she thought of little else besides her home in Chamba." So there are descriptions of the weather. Then there is a description of her daily chores, she feeds the cattle, she cooks food for her husband's parents, and probably more things that the author isn't giving us here. But after she finishes all that she has time to herself to sit and think about her village.

Now, we see here that Manak's mother forces Manak to marry another woman because she wanted grandchildren. And that's stated very bluntly, halfway through the story. But before we're given that piece of information, there is a sentence on the second page that says, this is the morning when Guleri is supposed to leave for Chamba, right. And there is a sentence here that says, "on the long awaited morning, Guleri was ready long before dawn. She had no children and therefore no problem of either having to leave them with her husband's parents or taking them with her."

So in Guleri's mind or we assume that in Guleri's mind, having children would present itself as a problem to her plans for yearly travel. So this is the only travel, the only journey she gets to make once a year. And if she had children then she would either have to leave them in her husband's care or not her husband's care but with her husband and her in-laws. And she would probably have to be back sooner and she would be worried that they couldn't settle with them and little things like that. Or she would have to take them with her. And traveling with children cannot be easy. She would have to wake up much earlier than she did to get them ready, pack with them, pack for them, sorry. And take them to her parents' home, make sure that her parents would look after them while she was socializing with her friends.

So children, in this very, very small use of the word problem, we see that children aren't something that Guleri misses having or she doesn't feel the lack of children in her life. She is perfectly happy; she is perfectly content is what is the impression we get here. And Guleri is also rather childlike. She is, she feels homesick, she is excited at the prospect of travel, she counts the days to the harvest. And she is very joyful when her father's servant comes with a horse to pick her up. And even the manner in which her socializing with friends is described. It says "Two of her friends who are also married to boys outside Chamba came home at the same time of the year." Note the use of the word boys and not men. "The girls looked forward to this annual meeting when they spent many hours every day talking about their experiences, their joys and sorrows. They would have new dresses made for the occasion and they dye and starch their dupattas and they buy glass bangles and silver earrings."

So we get a sense that Guleri is married off while she is still very young. And if she has been married for seven years, well, we assume that she cannot be more than 25 or 26 at the very least. I'm sorry, at the most. And she is still a child is the impression we get, there we are.

Now just to conclude, the general sense of village life that we have, there is also a sense that Guleri's father or Guleri's family is to say, slightly better off than Manak's. Because when Manaks sees Guleri at a fair and they fall in love with each other and they wish to get married, Manak is worried about how much Guleri's father is going to ask him for bride price. And he is worried that he might not be able to pay that amount except there is a sentence here that says that "Guleri's father was prosperous and that he had lived in cities. And he had sworn that he would not take money for his daughter, but would give her to a worthy young man of good family. Manak, he had decided, answered these requirements and very soon after Guleri and Manak were married."

So Manak is very aware that Guleri's father is well off, and that he respects Manak and he respects Manak's family. And yet, Manak does not do anything when he knows very well what his mother plans to do to Guleri and to their marriage. This brings us to another interesting point, a rather natural progression to an interesting point, which is, well, two interesting points actually. One is about Manak's mother and another one is about Manak himself.

So Manak's mother wields a lot of power in the house and not in an obvious way, but she is a strong woman. And she is scornful of her son for not being manly enough because there is a scene when Manak comes back home after walking with Guleri halfway to her village in Chamba. And when he comes back, he sits down on the charpai because he's tired. And

Manak's mother asks him if he has been all the way to Chamba and he says, no, no, just not all the way just to the top of the hill, and his voice is heavy. And his mother says, "why do you croak like an old woman, be a man. Manak wanted to retort, 'You are a woman, why do not you cry like one for a change,' but he remained silent." And that one sentence, that one exchange is all we need to know to be certain of Manak's mother's position in the household. Because you see that Manak's mother can be seen as a woman, certainly, yes. But a woman who controls the household, who obviously makes all the decisions because although Manak's father is alive and living, there is no mention of him whatsoever apart from the fact that he has food cooked for him by Guleri and that he and his wife give her their blessings when Guleri makes her annual journey to Chamba.

So Manak's mother controls the household and it's possible to say that she can be seen as a matriarch who embodies patriarchal values because she is staunch about certain things like Guleri needing to produce children- produce children until you probably have a male child. And if that is not possible, then you must get a wife who will do so. And it is not manly for Manak to sit on a charpai and sigh just because his wife has gone away for a few days, or in this case forever. Nevertheless, it is not manly for Manak to sit and sigh.

So this is the point about Manak's mother but it also takes us to a point about Manak, about how much autonomy or how much independence he has over his own will, over his own body and the same questions can be extended to the other characters in the novel as well.

So there's the question of mobility, a physical mobility in this text. You see Guleri travelling from Lakarmandi to Chamba by a mare, you see them walking up to the hill to look at Chamba whenever Guleri is homesick, that is two points. You see the reference Guleri makes to going through the bluebell wood, which is another instance of physical mobility that is three points. Guleri and her friends travelling through Chamba walking around, fourth point. What else? Manak going to the fair with his friends, which is where he met Guleri, which is where he goes back every year, which is five points. And most importantly, Manak and Guleri walking halfway to Chamba, which is up to the hill. And then Manak comes back and Guleri onwards. So there's about six instances of physical mobility from one place to another in this text. And it would be difficult to say that all of them are completely of their own will. Because Guleri going to Chamba, going home every year to Chamba is something she is certainly excited about, but she has no other place to go to. She has her husband's house in Lakarmandi, which

is where she is all year or she has her father's house in Chamba. So these are the only two places she has ever known and these are the places she will keep shuttling between.

Manak goes as far as the hill to say goodbye to Guleri when she is going home this time for the harvest festival. And this is the only time we ever see the two of them fairly alone together, if we discount the horse and the manservant that Guleri's father sends to pick up his daughter. And even in this time that, where they're as alone as they can be, you see Manak being unable to articulate what he wants to say, or it doesn't even seem like he is trying because there is one section here, yes, where Manak says he will go a part of the way with her and Guleri is happy because she has his company and she loves him. And she hides Manak's flute under her dupatta and when they reach a certain point, she says 'come play a flute for me you know, we're alone together. Let us, I think it is about time you played your flute because I like to listen to you play.' And Manak is lost in his own thoughts. And Guleri says why will you not play your flute and Manak just looks at her and he takes his flute and he does not play it. He simply sounds the flute and it is not a tune, it is "an anguished wail of a sound." That is what it is described as. And then, he says "Guleri don't go away. I ask you again, do not go home this time." And that is all he can tell her. He is unable to tell her what his mother has planned, he is unable to tell her that his mother wants children and Guleri shows no indication of being aware of these thoughts either or of Manak's mother as having spoken to her about this. Because she is perfectly content, she is going to go back for, she is going to go back to her house for a few days and then she is going to come back again and life will continue as usual.

These are physical instances of mobility and in a sense, they can be termed as body autonomy. But as we see, Manak goes where he is directed to go to the fields, maybe at one point of time to the fair. And now because he wanted to, I suppose we can see this as Manak really wanted to go say goodbye to Guleri. So he walks a part of the way with her. And that's a good instance of body autonomy for Manak. But even though he is able to do that, he is not able to make his lips, to make his tongue to use his voice, to sound the words that he wants to tell Guleri, that he loves her, that he's going to miss her, that his mother is going to do this.

When Manak has a child with his second wife, and there's a section where it's described as Manak's body responding to a new woman because he is obedient to his mother and to custom, but his heart is dead within him. And again, you get a sense of how respected his mother is in the household and how powerful she is because his mother is conflated to custom. And you get



a sense of how women are supposed to be the placeholders for cultural value and for tradition and for, I suppose custom and value, so to speak. But his heart was dead within him.

If we're to move on to look at perhaps the characters of Guleri and Manak, we have already discussed about how Guleri was probably married off while she was still young, but she has been married for seven years. And if she was a child when she was married, she must have been very young, which would account for her being childlike and excited and happy. But she is still the same, and she is excited about the prospect of buying new things, of meeting her friends, like she's going out to play in the evenings or at the prospect of dyeing her dupattas. And you know, she hugs her father's horse and these are things that children would do. And that's the sense we get except we are not sure if this is a comment on how Guleri is or if it is a larger comment on how a lot of women in situations like Guleri spend their time and get excited about little things, simply because they have restricted mobility in terms of physical spatial mobility, or if this is a comment on how women are supposed to spend their time in this way doing these things.

But if we're talking about how childlike Guleri is, then we've also got to look at how childlike Manak is. Because Manak is clueless and; he's not clueless, he is clued in to what is going to happen once Guleri leaves but he is helpless. And he is childlike in the sense that he is despondent and he is grieving. And he looks at Guleri with wounded eyes and he makes anguished wails on his flute. But is unable to tell her what exactly it is that he needs her to do.

And so, in a sense, you can see both of them as nearly children almost because Guleri accuses Manak of having gone through a bluebell wood, which appears to be a local tale that there is a bluebell wood close by and anyone who walks through the wood becomes deaf. And when Guleri tells Manak to play his flute, and to talk to her, and to spend time with her, Manak just looks at her. And Guleri says 'I will be back in a few days, you should not be this way' and he still looks at her and he says don't go.

And Guleri says, well, it seems like you have gone through the bluebell wood because you cannot hear a single word I am saying. And Manak says, yeah, you are right. I cannot hear a single word you're saying. And then the sentence after that I think, one moment. Yes, Manak agrees that he cannot hear anything that Guleri says he says, and he sighs a deep sigh. "Both of them looked at each other. Neither understood the other's thoughts. 'I will go now, you had better return home, you've come a long way,' said Guleri gently", and she gives his flute back. And then she asks him if he'll come and play it at the fair, and she looks very pretty, and the

sun is shining in her eyes, and Manak just turns his face away. And Guleri is, doesn't understand what is going on. She is perplexed, but she shrugs her shoulders and she goes back to Chamba because, you know, she thinks to herself, 'well, I'm going to be back in a few days. And maybe he will be better then.'

But she accuses him of having gone through the bluebell wood of not understanding her and of not hearing a thing she says. But you see that Guleri also seems to have metaphorically passed through this bluebell wood because she does not understand Manak's anguish either. If she goes home every year, and she has been going home every year for the past seven years, then by now it's a normal occurrence. It is an event in the year, certainly, but it has become normalized. And yet, if we assume that Manak shows some signs of distress at her going away each year, that's fine. But this year, his distress seems to be more exacerbated, and it's described in that way. He says, 'do not go away this year. Stay for just this year. It is just one year, why do not you stay back where you can go next year.' He does not even say you can go next year. He says, just stay back for one year.

And Guleri says, 'No. Why? Why would I do that? Your parents haven't stopped me, your mother hasn't said anything.' Again, note here the mother is referred to as being the sole authority of deciding whether Guleri gets to go home or not each year. Not by way of explicitly granting permission, but by way of not saying no. So as long as Manak's mother does not say no to something, it is allowed. But the moment she steps up and says no, it is explicitly understood that it must never be done again, I suppose. So Guleri doesn't understand Manak's especial anguish this year at her going away. And she does not understand his nonverbal cries because Manak is unable to articulate why she should not go away. He just says 'don't go.'

And it's also interesting to note that Manak has no concrete plan on how to perhaps change his mother's mind or stop her or oppose her or divert her from this resolve that she is set on that, you know, after this, even after seven years of Manak and Guleri having no children, then I will make sure that Manak marries a woman who will give him children.

He, there is no, he knows exactly what his mother's resolve is always but there is no indication that he's got a plan to stop her. There is no indication that he will tell Guleri what is going on and they will work through it together, or together they will convince his mother. Nothing of this sort. It's just panic and sadness and grief at the thought of losing Guleri. And at the thought of Guleri going away and the thought that she is not going to be his wife any longer and that he is not going to see her again. And that's what makes him say, 'no, do not go, do not leave'

and it is almost like a child begging his mother not to leave and in that sense, Manak is extremely childlike as well. He is powerless and he is also extremely vulnerable. And it's not just against his mother it is against an entire system, the patriarchal system, that deems that families must have children, married couples must have children. So perhaps it's not just Guleri who is the child here. It certainly looks like Manak is as well because he seems to be extremely hemmed in and blocked by a system that gives him great grief. And yet, he is required to prove himself and conform to its rules in order to be able to survive its rules, which are being perpetuated by his mother, okay.

But if this system is all encompassing, and there is no escape from it, because that is the picture that is being painted here, it's a little bleak. The system also demands that, as I have said before, married couples need to have children. You need to have a male child in order to carry on the lineage. In a setting such as this, which seems to be highly patriarchal, it is understandable. In a setting such as this, which seems to be highly patriarchal, this is brought out very, very clearly.

We see that Manak's mother hopes to shock or startle Manak from his state of dazed apathy and his almost mechanical existence of everyday life. When his child is born, so she thinks to herself, that when she places Manak's son, a child, his own child in his lap, Manak will show some emotion. Perhaps love the child, perhaps treat his new wife and his son like family. And she does that. And Manak stares at the child for a while. And then he starts screaming and he says, take him away. He smells of kerosene. And I can't stand it. And he becomes hysterical, that is the word that is used.

So this breakdown that we see at the end of the story, and that is where the story ends. And we are not given any indication as to how the story continues after that, but it's a rupture. It's a breakdown in how patriarchy functions. Manak is unable to hold his own son. And it's not even hold his son in the sense of an embrace or a hug. This is a child; this is a child who is probably less than a day or two days old. And Manak is unable to hold an infant, his son because when the child is placed in his lap, the only thing he can smell is kerosene, which is what Guleri used to kill herself with.

And if his heir, if Manak's heir is going to be tainted by the stench of kerosene, which is what annihilated his first wife, a woman who was unable to give him a son and hence, continue his line then it is definitely a rupture in how patriarchy functions, in how the system functions, in how Manak's mother runs her family as a good patriarchal unit. And if he is unable to hold his

son, then how will his family survive? Manak is supposed to be the head of a family as every patriarchal family is. Manak is a man and he is the head of the family. And the father is supposed to teach the son the craft of the family, the technique of their business, of how to make money, of how to save, of how to run his family, of perhaps, how to get married, how to live life, these are things that a father passes on to a son. And if this is not going to happen, then despite the fact that Manak has a living male heir, the lineage will probably not continue in the sense of father passing things down to his son traditionally.

But if we are to flip this and look at it in another way, then you can also wonder if perhaps Manak has outlived his usefulness here because now that the family has an heir, now that Manak's mother has a grandchild or rather a grandson, a boy who will continue the family name and business and everything else, now that Manak's mother has that, is there a use for Manak after all? And that is to put it very bluntly because obviously there is a use for Manak in the sense of everyday existence. But there is no need for him to have more children perhaps, or she is, or Manak's mother is not going to force them into another marriage or do what she did to Guleri, do to the second wife what she did to Guleri because now she has the son.

So you see that Manak is also a victim here of not just his mother, Manak's mother is also a victim. Both of them are victims as is Guleri, of the entire system of patriarchy. And this is, cannot be pinned down to just one person. Okay.

Now, there's a last point that I will make and then we can just go through interesting excerpts from the text. And that point is that, we have been talking about patriarchy as a system, a large abstract system in a small space, and we've seen how it functions, not just through a single individual as is commonly assumed, a man, but how it functions through women as well. Manak's mother perpetuates patriarchy when she conforms to patriarchal norms of wanting children from a marriage. Manak conforms to patriarchy when he conforms to his mother and custom. And when he does not do anything to try and hold Guleri back. Guleri conforms to patriarchy as well by being a victim of it. But then again, Manak and his mother are victims of it as well. Manak's mother loses Manak in heart and mind and Manak loses his heart because he loved Guleri and she dies. So you see that it's not a clear line here, but that they're all perpetuating it and are simultaneously victims of this huge system that is pretty abstract. But, and that this is, again to come back to the point I was saying this is about a large system functioning in this small narrative, and it's brought out really, really well.

But if we were to look at the structure of this story or the viewpoints from which this story is told, it's set in Lakarmandi, which is where Manak lives. And that is the setting from which we're made familiar with all the characters here. So physically, spatially it is located there. Outside, let's go back to the first paragraph in the story, "outside a mare neighed." Outside, it is understood that it is outside Manak's house, which is in Lakarmandi.

It is *from* Lakarmandi that they go to Chamba. It is *from* Lakarmandi that they go up to the hill, to the bluebell woods. It is *in* this village, in Manak's house that Manak lives, that Manak is born, where he has lived, where he works. It is *in the fields in this* village where he is sitting when he sees his friend Bhavani go to the fair. It is in the same field that he is sitting when he hears about Guleri's death.

It is on the hill *from* Lakarmandi when he reminisces about how he met Guleri, fell in love with her and married her. It is in the house that we see how Manak's mother is the one who makes the decisions, who wields power. It is in the house that the climax takes place when Manak rejects his son by screaming that he stinks of kerosene. It is in this village that we hear about Guleri's death, and we are not given any insight whatsoever into Guleri's mind apart from when she is happy and childlike.

So, you see that the readers are never really clued in into what Guleri's thoughts and emotions and reactions are. There is a beautiful description of her life given, which is that she is happy, she is happy to go back, she is homesick now and then, she is always excited, she is playful, she does all her duties very well. But this is not a day-to-day account of things. This is not an insight into her character because you don't know how Guleri reacts when she is confronted with a tragedy or disaster or something that makes her angry. Yes, you do see her getting into a temper with Manak when he says please stay back, but that's about it, but that's between the two of them. And that is because he stops her from leaving though or he asks her to not leave the village, to stay back at home with him.

But while she is away from Lakarmandi, while she is away from this space which is what the narrative encompasses, while she is away from here, and she is in Chamba, we have no idea as to how her mind works. We're not given any indication as to what she might have been thinking or what she felt when she heard that Manak had married somebody else. And to me, that's a very interesting point because it seems like that is the single greatest tragedy or the single greatest piece of bad news Guleri has ever received in her life. It's definitely the most earth-

shattering piece of news she has received that her husband whom she loves and whom she is supposed to see a few days later has married another woman.

And she makes the extreme decision of killing herself. And Guleri is a girl whose father has probably taught her own self-worth. At least more than what can be expected of in villages according to this narrative, because he has lived in cities and he is prosperous. And he does not take bride price for his girl. He just wants someone who would respect her. And yet she takes the step. And we are not given any insight into how her mind was working then. So it's an interesting point to consider.

These are all the points that I wanted to raise in this story. And that brings us to the end of that. But we will go through some excerpts that I have chosen. And we will see how they stand out in terms of language, in terms of how they deliver the narrative and the impact better.

Here is a section we can focus on.

“It crossed Manak’s mind that it was this time of year, seven years ago, that he and his friends had come on this very road to go to the harvest festival in Chamba. And it was at this fair that Manak had first seen Guleri and they had bartered their hearts to each other.” Bartered their hearts, not fell in love, not vowed to be married, but they bartered their hearts to each other. That is a very nice turn of phrase there.

“Later managing to meet her alone, Manak remembered taking her hand and telling her ‘you are like unripe corn, full of milk.’ ‘Cattle go for unripe corn,’ Guleri had replied, freeing her hand with a jerk. ‘Human beings like it better roasted. If you want me go and ask for my hand from my father.’ ”

Now that is all the indication we are given about that courtship, so to speak, and it is not even a courtship. They bartered their hearts and Guleri said that Manak would have to speak to her father if he wished to marry her. But you see that she’s got spirit and she’s got fire, no pun intended. And it provides a better character insight into Guleri than the first page does when she is described as going about her daily chores.

This is another excerpt we will look at. This is when Manak is sitting in the fields and his friend Bhavani passes him to go to the fair in Chamba. Manak asks him where he is going and Bhavani says nowhere in particular. And he says after a point that he is going to the Chamba fair.

“Bhavani’s words pierced through Manak’s heart like a needle. ‘Is the fair today?’ ‘It is the same day every year,’ replied Bhavani dryly. ‘Don’t you remember we were in the same party seven years ago?’ Bhavani did not say anymore but Manak was conscious of the other man’s rebuke and he felt uneasy. Bhavani put down the chillum and picked up his bundle. His flute was sticking out of the bundle. Bidding Manak farewell, he walked away. Manak’s eyes remained on the flute till Bhavani disappeared from view.”

Throughout the story, we see Manak being associated with two objects. One is his flute and another one is the chillum. Manak is smoking his chillum when we are first introduced to him as a character. Guleri asks him to play his flute when he comes to pick her up from the fair. Manak also plays his flute when Guleri is leaving, his flute seems to be his favourite possession. And in this scene, you see Manak with both his chillum and his flute.

You also see Bhavani censuring him non-verbally because he’s being sarcastic. And he says that yes, we all went there together seven years ago. Seven years ago was when he met Guleri and when he married Guleri and Manak does not say anything in response to this. He is quiet. He takes this retort without responding to it. But you can see that it hurts him because the words say so and because he feels uneasy. He keeps looking at the flute because he remembers that every year he goes and he plays his flute at the fair, and he and Guleri come back together. And pretty soon, Manak becomes like a man dead. His face quite blank, his eyes empty, and his heart is dead as well. And this is just an interesting point to note.

This is the last point to note. Yes, right when Manak receives the news about Guleri having set herself on fire, it says “She soaked her clothes in kerosene and she set fire to them. Manak, mute with pain could only stare and feel his own life burning out.”

So in that moment when he hears the news, all of those events are sort of conflated together. And I cannot stress the importance of those three lines before the last section of the story. Not simply because of the news and the information they convey to the reader, but the way in which they’re written, which is seemingly so simple and yet delivers so much of a punch because everything seems to be happening, all the action of the story seems to be centered in those three lines because Guleri hears. So when you look at it from Guleri’s point of view there is, if Guleri were reading these lines or had written them, there is a second marriage, immediately Guleri soaks her clothes in kerosene, sets it on fire. And while this is happening it seems, it almost seems as if the news is being relayed to Manak the same time as Guleri is committing this act and Manak can feel his own life burning out. It’s a present continuous tense, it is happening as

he is receiving the news. And he is receiving the news as Guleri is committing this act back at her parent's house, a place she was really, really happy at.

So I'd encourage you to look at these three lines, and think of everything that they signify in terms of the news they convey, in terms of how they are structured, in terms of the tenses, they use as well. And that brings us to the end of this lecture. Thank you.